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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4447  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1722  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1737  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 3936  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4353  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002017

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2016  
TAGS: [ASCH](#) [APER](#) [AMGT](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: STATE CRITICIZES CHURCH

REF: LA PAZ 1956

Classified By: Ambassador David N. Greenlee for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A growing confrontation between church and state, which began as a debate about religious education, has broadened into a larger discussion of religion in general. Religion and religious education will be discussed in Congress in relation to a pending education bill as well as in the upcoming Constituent Assembly. Minister of Education Felix Patzi and President Morales have publicly attacked the Catholic Church, with Morales stating that the Church was behaving as it did during the Inquisition. Senate President Santos Ramirez articulated a more reasoned GOB position which would permit religious freedom and not unduly favor Catholicism, but as with many issues, the public rantings of the Morales' government overshadow reason. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) A discredited National Education Congress, deserted by universities, urban teachers, religious leaders, and private schools, approved the MAS proposal for secular education on July 14 (reftel). The church viewed the congress' results as a threat to religious education, which is currently funded by the state in public schools. The MAS proposal was based on a bill to be debated in Congress, which, among other things, would secularize education, create indigenous universities, and impose "social control" over teachers and universities. Following the educational congress, the church sought to open debate with President Evo Morales on religious education; Morales passed the buck to the Constituent Assembly.

¶3. (SBU) On July 24, Education Minister Felix Patzi accused the Catholic church of siding with the rich "oligarchy" for 514 years and asked church leaders to stop lying to the public about the GOB's intentions regarding religion. Morales heated up the rhetoric the following day, stating that leaders of the Catholic Church were behaving as they did during the Inquisition. Morales added that religion would be debated during the Constituent Assembly, including the behavior of priests dating back to the colonial era. (NOTE: On a separate issue, Minister of Government Alicia Munoz accused the Catholic Church of hiding two Paraguayans

suspected in the death of Cecilia Cubas, the daughter of former Paraguayan President Raul Cubas. END NOTE). In response to the GOB's various attacks, the church requested a respectful, tolerant dialogue with the state on religion and religious education; citizens of Santa Cruz responded by marching in favor of religious education July 25.

¶4. (C) Senate President Santos Ramirez articulated a more reasoned GOB position on religion to the DCM July 26. Ramirez noted the diversity of Bolivia's population, stating that all religious traditions must be respected, not just Catholicism.

He said it would be "ridiculous" to think that the GOB wanted to eliminate the Catholic Church, but that it would not impose a Catholic education on its citizens. Ramirez said the GOB, including President Morales, has made clear its respect for the church, but said "some people" want to use this issue to attack them. Ramirez said the GOB does not want confrontation with the church, and implied that Minister of Education Patzi had crossed that line.

¶5. (C) Comment: While the GOB's bottom-line position on religion is reasonable -- respecting diversity and moving toward state-church separation -- its public rantings overshadow this reason. Continuing with its theme of anti-colonization, the MAS administration has picked a dangerous fight with the church in a majority-Catholic country. While the administration's actions seem aimed at constraining the power (and the public financing) of the church rather than restricting religious freedom, the GOB has touched some nerves and will have to engage the Catholic Church in order to move forward. End comment.  
GREENLEE